

MOVIES FOR IMMIGRANTS

We can hear about a right to migrate in words and songs, but movies let us see migration in action. When people on the big screen move or try to move, we can see their choices and their problems from their angle. Movies can help us focus on the names, faces, and feelings of individual immigrants. With our eyes open, we can see the harm to immigrants caused by native fear and prejudice. Movies with action, humor, big stars, and big budgets can get immigrant stories noticed by millions of people who otherwise would not see the immigrant's view. Fortunately, many movies which support the title and idea of this book already have been made.

Migration was a subject of movies even before movie actors could talk. Charlie Chaplin starred as *The Immigrant* in a 1917 silent film showing a few events in the life of one poor immigrant arriving in America. A hundred years earlier, many immigrants were forced to move to America. The passengers on one ship, *The Amistad*, won the right to return back to Africa. During World War II, refugees from Europe looked for shelter anywhere, even in *Casablanca*. The American Film Institute in 1988 named *Casablanca* the second best movie of all time.

Films about cowboys and Indians were very popular for many years, and the heroes often were the immigrants who rode their horses onto land that once was “for

natives only.” The 1952 movie *The Savage* starring Charlton Heston shows that violence can be avoided only after both sides accept the other's right to exist and to move.

Long ago, European nations made colonies around the world and allowed or even helped their citizens to migrate to and from their colonies. Recent movies have shown how these immigrants with great opportunity interacted with the much poorer natives in earlier years. The very popular movie *Out of Africa* (seven Academy Awards, best picture) was based on writings of a European immigrant to Africa in the early 1900's. *A Passage to India* and *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* picture how the European immigrants may have adapted to the differing cultures and people of India and China.

In America, natives were removed from most of their land as Europeans migrated west. *Far and Away* shows how these immigrants cooperated and competed with each other as they moved from a crowded country into a new one where land was free. *Thousand Pieces of Gold* and *Hawaii* show how a few people left much more crowded countries in Asia to become Americans. *Golden Gate*, *A Great Wall*, and *The Joy Luck Club* tell more recent Asian-American stories.

Today, poor people migrate toward nations with higher paying jobs and more freedom. Stories about those who cross borders to find opportunity and those who

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guard borders to remove opportunity have been the focus of some good movies. *Journey of Hope* (1990 Academy Award winner, best foreign language film) tells the true story of a Turkish family who mistakenly believed that Switzerland was a friendly country. *El Norte*, also a foreign film with English subtitles, tells of a brother and sister who escape from Guatemala only to be chased again by the Americans. *The Border*, starring Jack Nicholson, tells of one of the border guards doing the chasing. Some days he wonders if he is doing more harm than good.

Strong feelings about immigration lead to civil war in the film *Idaho Closes Its Borders*. The United States says yes to refugees but individual states say no.

The paths of migration are blocked even between countries and groups of people who seem almost equals. *Green Card* (best picture, 1991 Golden Globe Awards) shows the things a French man might do to avoid being deported from the United States back to France. In *Gung Ho*, U.S. auto workers and their new Japanese bosses discover that all must work together or all will lose their jobs. When cultures blend together, even natives can be deported if their faces look too foreign. *Born in East L.A.* and *My Family* both show American citizens being rejected from the United States, hoping to someday return to the land of the free.

Movies that focus on immigration are listed on the following pages. Twenty-three of the 32 movies were available for rent from local video stores, and 5 others were shown recently on television. Thus, most are both popular and easily available. Many of the movies were selected from a complete search of the 1991 Halliwell's Film Guide (HarperCollinsPublishers, Inc., New York.) A few others were added to the list by family and friends. With a video cassette recorder

plus about \$2.50, you can rent a movie and see a new view of immigration in just 2 hours, more or less.

Different people may enjoy different types of movies. Children of all ages might like the cartoon *An American Tail*, the *Coneheads* from space, or the funny acting of *The Immigrant*. Many of the movies contain bad language, even in several languages, but most show little or no sex and only the violence that happens in real life. *The Border* and *El Norte* have more violent scenes, and *The Border* and *Coming to America* have one or two nude or topless scenes.

The title of *Coming to America* is actually backward and the roles are reversed in this humorous movie. The only immigrant is a poor young New Yorker who moves to Africa to find a much better life with her handsome prince. In migration, all roads can lead to happy endings once the roadblocks are removed.

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Table 7. Movies for Immigrants

	<u>Movie / Star</u>	<u>Type / Source</u>	<u>Year / Length / Summary</u>
1.	<i>The Alamo</i> John Wayne	Western	1960, 3 hr, 40 min Americans immigrate into Mexico and then fight to remove Texas from Mexico.
2.	<i>An American Tail</i> Steven Spielberg	Cartoon Universal	1986, 1 hr 21 min A Russian mouse family risks an ocean voyage to find an America with fewer, friendlier cats.
3.	<i>The Amistad</i>	<i>History</i> Dreamworks	1997, 2 hr 30 min Mutiny on a slave ship gives African citizens the right to return to their homes.
4.	<i>The Border</i> Jack Nicholson	Drama Universal	1981, 1 hr 48 min A Texas border guard sees that a better life for himself is not worth the great harm his job causes to others.
5.	<i>Born in East L.A.</i> Cheech Marin	Comedy Universal	1987, 1 hr 25 min An American gets no chance to return home after being deported by mistake to Mexico.
6.	<i>Casablanca</i> Humphrey Bogart	Drama Warner Bros	1943, 1 hr 42 min A man with no nation hosts refugees from many nations awaiting visas to nations still free.
7.	<i>Coming to America</i> Eddie Murphy	Comedy Paramount	1988, 1 hr 57 min A wealthy young man travels overseas to find a bride to share the good life with him in Africa.
8.	<i>Coneheads</i> Dan Aykroyd	Comedy Paramount	1993, 1 hr 30 min Illegal aliens from the planet Romulus use fake documents to trick the Immigration and Naturalization Service.
9.	<i>El Norte</i> Zaide Gutierrez	Drama Engl. subt.	1983, 2 hr 19 min Two Native-Americans flee Guatemala to search for better lives farther north on their continent.

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10.	<i>Far and Away</i> Tom Cruise	Drama Universal	1992, 2 hr 20 min Two Irish immigrants find freedom and free land in an America that welcomed all.
11.	<i>Fitzcarraldo</i> Klaus Kiniski	Drama Anchor Bay	1982, 2 hr 38 min An Irishman succeeds against great odds at building an opera house in the Peru jungle.
12.	<i>Golden Gate</i> Matt Dillon	Drama Am. Playhouse	1993, 1 hr 30 min An FBI agent in San Francisco hunts for evil in Chinatown and finds good instead.
13.	<i>A Great Wall</i> Peter Wang	Comedy Mainline	1987, 1 hr 42 min A Chinese-American executive returns to China after 20 years to visit a sister he left behind.
14.	<i>Green Card</i> Gerard Depardieu	Comedy Touchstone	1991, 1 hr 47 min A fake marriage designed to fool the Immigration and Naturalization Service somehow leads to love.
15.	<i>Gung Ho</i> Michael Keaton	Comedy Paramount	1986, 1 hr 50 min Japanese managers are invited to a small U.S. town to run its car factory and save its jobs.
16.	<i>Hawaii</i> James Michener	Drama UA	1966, 3 hr 6 min Chinese, Japanese, Americans and native Hawaiians all try to live together on a few small islands.
17.	<i>Hunt for Red October</i> Sean Connery	Drama Paramount	1990, 2 hr 15 min Immigration is a very risky move for the commander of a Soviet submarine.
18.	<i>Idaho Closes Its Borders</i> Beau Bridges	Comedy HBO	1997, 1 hr 40 min The governor of Idaho refuses to welcome refugees and causes a civil war.

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19.	<i>The Immigrant</i> Charles Chaplin	Silent Mutual	1917, 20 min Two immigrants become friends on their voyage to America and continue their friendship on land.
20.	<i>Inn of the 6th Happiness</i> Ingrid Bergman	Biography	1958, 3 hr An English woman travels to China, becomes a citizen, gains friends, and adopts a family.
21.	<i>Josephine Baker Story</i> Lynn Whitfield	Biography HBO	1991, 2 hr 9 min A poor African-American woman finds fame and fortune in Paris as a dancer.
22.	<i>Journey of Hope</i> Xavier Koller	Drama Swiss, Eng. sub.	1990, 1 hr 51 min A Kurdish family from Turkey risk and lose everything in their illegal attempt to find a better life in Switzerland.
23.	<i>The Joy Luck Club</i> Tsai Chan	Drama Hollywood Pict.	2 hr 19 min Asian-Americans search for lost relatives and share experiences from both sides of the Pacific.
24.	<i>Lonely in America</i>	Drama Arista	1991, 1 hr 34 min An Indian immigrant to New York City uses night school and hard work to overcome loneliness and find success.
25.	<i>My Family</i> Jimmy Smits	Drama Engl. subt.	2 hr 7 min An Hispanic family stays in America even though the mother, a U.S. citizen, is deported.
26.	<i>Out of Africa</i> Meryl Streep	Drama Universal	1985, 2 hr 41 min A European woman in colonial Africa eventually returns to Denmark, a place where her Kenyan friends cannot go.

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27. <i>A Passage to India</i> Judy Davis	Drama Columbia	1984, 2 hr 43 min British immigrants to colonial India make new friendships that are nearly ruined by a false accusation.
28. <i>The Perez Family</i> Marisa Tomei	Drama Sam Goldwyn	1995, 2 hr 15 min Cuban immigrants learn to help each other in a land where few people help you.
29. <i>The Quiet Man</i> John Wayne	Drama RPC	1952, 2 hr 33 min An American prizefighter moves to Ireland to find peace but finds turmoil instead.
30. <i>The Savage</i> Charlton Heston	Western Paramount	1952, 1 hr 35 min A few people with much land fight against many more who wish to immigrate.
31. <i>Ten Commandments</i> Charlton Heston	Religious Paramount	1956, 4 hr 5 min Moses wins the right to migrate and leads a large exodus out of Egypt.
32. <i>1000 Pieces of Gold</i> Rosalind Chao	Drama Maverick	1992, 1 hr 40 min A Chinese woman is sold to an Oregon miner, is freed, is pushed around, and finally stands her ground in this new land.
33. <i>The Three Amigos</i> Chevy Chase	Comedy Orion	1986, 2 hr Three American film stars fight for truth, justice, and the American way in Mexico.